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Computers are focus of imaginary project chosen by local leadership participants

By VERNITA PEEKS

A project to provide up-to-date computer, software and Internet access for all students in the county to use at home was the imaginary project chosen by the Marshall County participants in the second session of the Community Development Academy on Empowering Community Leadership in Manhattan last Thursday.

The group was assigned a project relating to the Internet.

The Marshall County group for the second session included Karen Trail, Axtell; Bob Carlson, Doug Powers, Marilyn Wulschleger and Vernita Peeks, Marysville.

Jada Ackerman, Marysville, represented Blue Valley Telecommunications, and Lynsey Wanklyn, Frankfort, represented the Marshall County Economic Development Council.

Blue Valley and MCEDC are local sponsors of the academy.

The purpose of the imaginary project was to work out methods to be used, ways of collecting and distributing information, and how to schedule and implement the project.

The academy was developed by USDA Rural Development, FHLBank, Topeka, K-State Research and Extension and the Kansas Rural Development Foundation.

The last of three sessions in the academy will be Oct. 5.

Before the problem project assignments, each of the groups presented information on assets, current projects, opportunities and challenges.

Participants learned that Onaga with a population of 700 has a neighborhood revitalization program with a 10-year sliding scale tax rebate, that the Pottawatomie County 1 percent sales tax generates \$150,000 a year and that housing is the big challenge.

In Dickinson County, half the population lives in Abilene and less than 10 percent of the population lives on active farms.

Herington and Hope, two of the nine other incorporated cities in the county also sent teams to the academy.

In Washington County, the city of Washington contracts with the sheriff's department for city protection, and the city of Washington owns and operates its own power plant.

One of the Washington County team members said the North Central Regional Planning Commission is essential in helping with development projects and applying for grants. He said he has found that rural America has an amazing skill level.

In the city of Hope, the school population has doubled since 1980 but the downtown lost three businesses in the last year and one of these was the grocery store. People live in Hope but work elsewhere.

In Herington, a condemned old high school building has been turned into the Hilltop Community Center with apartments on the top floors and a nutrition center on the main floor, along with an auditorium for community events.

A group of local investors built a new hotel/motel that has done unexpectedly well.

The Marion County team said the county needs to unify and work together for the whole county. The county's economic development council has a micro-loan revolving program for new business starts. Marion County has three trailer manufacturers, a honey manufacturer and Tabor College.

Minneapolis, 20 miles north of Salina, has a population of 2,100 and a city-owned power plant. The Minneapolis Raceway is new and was built by local investment.

Challenges are that 50 percent of the people work outside Minneapolis and there is no boundary culturally from Salina.

The Junction City/Geary County team said the communities of the county need to work together.

A big draw for the county is the fishing championships held at Milford Lake.

Council Grove has a population of 2,123 and is not growing.

Community assets include a new river walk, a planned assisted living residence, historic Kaw Mission and Hays House. The Council Grove team members said they need to work on their schools.

White City, 25 miles south of Fort Riley, has 23 new families this year and developers are building 75 new homes. The school is large enough for growth, but providing infrastructure for the growth is a problem.

The White City team reported that older people in the community don't like to see the growth.

Ackerman made the presentation for the Marshall County team.

She reported that high speed Internet is available everywhere in the county, that the per capita income is the second highest in the state and that Habitat for Humanity "is huge" in the county.

County needs are housing and transportation, she said.

After the presentations and the problem project, teams calculated a community development capacity index that can serve as a baseline to track progress over time.

Information was provided on Internet sites that provide census, income and other statistical data by state and county.

Participants also received samples of surveys that can be used to identify needs and potential in many areas.

Wulschleger was asked to talk about the Federal Home Loan Bank template on housing needs assessment.

Wulschleger has just finished a report/analysis that has not yet been presented to sponsors of the study.

She said she learned a lot and the template was not hard to do.

